SUSTAINABLE RURAL COMMUNITIES: A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF ISSUES AND SOME AVENUES OF ACTION

Ghislaine Vézina, Pierre Blais and Claude Michaud,
Ministère des Affaires municipales, du Sport et du Loisir

Photo : Pierre Lahoud

June 3, 2003

This text was written as Chapter 12 of the "*Guide de sensibilisation sur les collectivités viables*", a guide to increase awareness of sustainable communities, produced by *Vivre en ville*, and to be published in April 2004.

1. RURAL CHARACTERISTICS AND ISSUES

Rural Areas

Québec's rural areas, as defined in Québec's *Politique nationale de la ruralité* (Québec, 2001a), the Québec policy on rurality, are home to 1.6 million people—22% of Québec's population—and cover nearly 78% of Québec's inhabited territory, outside the 31 larger urban centers with populations over 10,000. If only municipalities of 5,000 people or fewer are considered, then rural areas account for 1.5 million inhabitants, representing 20% of the population.[1] An even more restrictive definition based on municipalities of 2,500 residents or less reduces the rural population to 0.9 million people, or 12% of the population.[2]

This quantitative description of Québec's rural regions provides little more than a relative sense of their size. It is risky at best to define rural regions strictly on the basis of population. Indeed, rural areas encompass a number of different environments that share the following characteristics (Québec, 2001a):

- Relatively low population and construction density, which gives rise to small communities scattered over large geographical areas dominated by vegetation;
- Land use predominated by agriculture, livestock production, and natural resource development;
- A population whose special relationship with space, nature, the climate, and the seasons shapes its social, economic, and cultural life;
- Communities where people know each other, share a sense of belonging, and closely identify with the area in which they live.

Although associated with the country, the forest, and extended natural spaces in general, rural areas are also made up of a series of service centers in the form of villages and small towns.

Photo : Pierre Lahoud

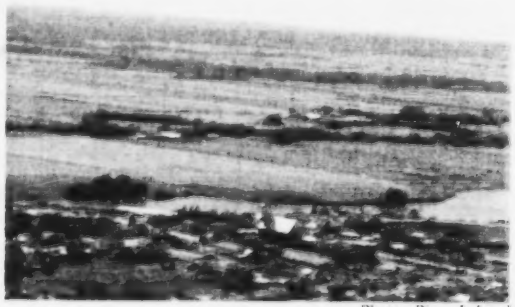


Photo : Pierre Lahoud

1 2001 census. Excluding Indian reservations, land set aside for the exclusive use of the Inuit and Cree villages, the Naskapi village, and the northern villages.

2 Idem.

Photo : Pierre Lahoud

Photo : Pierre Lahoud

Photo : Pierre Lahoud

Photo : Pierre Lahoud

Though they share common characteristics, rural areas may differ in the following ways, again according to the *Politique nationale de la ruralité* (Québec, 2001a; Jean, 1997):

- Certain rural areas are located adjacent to urban centers, which has a positive impact on their socioeconomic status. These areas are similar to their neighboring urban municipalities in terms of employment structure and the occupational profile of their residents. However, proximity to the city intensifies the trend toward scattered development and urban sprawl.
- In contrast, outlying rural areas located far from urban and service centers often face difficult socioeconomic situations as well as rapidly aging communities. Many are seeing the traditional foundations of their economies eroding and are struggling with the loss or disruption of local services.
- In between these poles, other rural areas can often rely on a dynamic agricultural sector that provides a solid and stable economic base, as well activities in manufacturing, tourism, recreation, and the service sector. Demographically, their situations vary considerably. Population aging, degradation of the built environment, and the difficulty of maintaining services are among the challenges some of these communities must overcome.[3]

3 Other rural typologies may also translate this diversity, notably the highly interesting proposal by sociologist Bruno Jean (2003, p. 105–124), who distinguishes between three types of rurality: "agricultural rurality", "forest rurality", and "recreational rurality".

Key Rural Development Issues

In light of the characteristics of rural areas, three main rural development issues can be identified: **destructuration** which is associated with haphazard incursions of urban land use into agricultural, agroforestry, and resort environments; **devitalization**, associated with population decline, social underdevelopment, or resource depletion; and lastly, **degradation of the physical environment** due to factors such as deforestation, landscape standardization, and various forms of pollution.

Destructuration

Destructuration of rural regions manifests itself in different ways: agricultural zones with scattered non-agricultural use, degraded forests, urban sprawl, rural roads with increasing truck traffic, thoroughfares transformed into residential roads, and uncontrolled resort and tourist development.

Destructuration is not a question of socioeconomic devitalization, even though the phenomenon may have negative socioeconomic consequences for local farmers and forestry operators. Rather, it is the gradual and unplanned introduction of various forms of land use into certain rural areas, posing a threat to their rural vocation over the long term. Affected areas are often, but not always, near urban areas. Inevitably, they pay a heavy price: loss of potential, difficult cohabitation of uses and populations, waste of resources, environmental degradation, land management problems, premature aging of facilities and infrastructures, increased maintenance, and management costs, etc.

Destructuration is both insidious and discreet, a process difficult to pinpoint and quantify, especially in terms of its cumulative, but no less real effects. At the outset, municipalities often view urban development as an opportunity to broaden the ir tax base and optimize infrastructures. However, after a few years, they may wind up having to provide new services and facilities to new residents, as well to restructure entire sectors of municipal territory (Québec, 1996).

Devitalization

According to geographer Clermont Dugas, "Devitalization can be defined as a process leading to a progressive, and sometimes rapid, decline in socioeconomic activity within a given spatial entity, the effects of which primarily impact upon demographics, land occupancy, habitat, service infrastructures, quality of life, and future outlook." (Dugas, 1991; Québec, 2001b).

The *Politique nationale de la ruralité* (Québec, 2001a) clearly describes the phenomenon of rural devitalization, which often takes the form of a regressive spiral. The closure of the main local business or the decline of the dominant economic activity (mining, forestry, fishery) causes job losses, sparking outmigration of the active population. The resulting demographic deficit leads to the disappearance or disruption of services, further fueling the desire to leave among remaining residents. The village stops growing, stagnates, sees local initiatives decline. The social tissue and economic structure erode and inexorably, the community loses residents. Issues related to the devitalization of isolated communities are described in more detail in Section 2.

Degradation of the physical environment

Different types of pollution affect rural areas. The harmful effects of certain intensive agriculture practices on water quality and rural ecosystems are among the more notable examples (Québec, 2003). Causes of agricultural pollution include the increased use of chemical products, harmful agricultural practices, increased animal waste, and the deterioration of shores. Agricultural pollution also sparks land use disputes related to the odors generated by livestock production and manure spreading. Forestry operations such as harvesting and the construction of logging roads can also affect water quality, cause erosion, and contribute to bank erosion and habitat degradation (Québec, 2003). Improper mining practices can also harm water, air, and soil conditions.

Excessive clearing is another form of rural environmental degradation. As described in the *Guide de conservation des boisés en milieu agricole* (Langevin, 1997), a guide describing methods to ensure protection of woodlands in agricultural areas, more intensive agricultural activity on southern Québec's agricultural plain has led to increased fragmentation of remaining woodlands and led to the gradual disappearance of certain natural features of the traditional agricultural landscape, such as isolated trees, tree groves, and shelter belts. Yet the woodlands have an important ecological purpose. They help conserve biodiversity by serving as reproductive habitat, shelter, and a resting place for a variety of animals. They also have recreational and tourist potential. And lastly, they play a significant agricultural role by reducing the soil erosion risk, diminishing water erosion, and limiting water loss through evaporation.

Our rural areas are characterized by a remarkable variety of geographical and architectural landscapes. As explained in Section 3, the challenge they face is to maintain these special features in the face of the deployment of modern and standardized models of urban development.

2. SUSTAINABILITY OF ISOLATED RURAL COMMUNITIES: A SAMPLE OF INITIATIVES

Issues and Challenges

Among the issues defined in the *Politique nationale de la ruralité* (Québec, 2001a) and of particular relevance for isolated rural communities, we will pay special attention to those concerned with demography, economic development, resource development, environmental improvements, service delivery, and participation of communities in their own development.

Demographic change is one of the most serious problems facing Québec, particularly in isolated rural communities, where provincial trends in population aging are exacerbated by the exodus of young people. Analysis of the evolution of the 15–19 age group between 1986 and 1996, by which time it had become the 25–29 age group, shows that it declined 36.4% in rural communities in difficulty. In contrast, prosperous rural communities registered a decline of only 18.1%, whereas in Québec as a whole, the group grew by 1.3%.

The economies of rural communities experiencing devitalization often depend heavily on declining sectors or a single industry. In these communities, economic diversification is crucial.

Given their distance from urban centers, integrated natural resource development plays a key part in diversification.

In the face of devitalization, rural areas gradually lose services. This forces residents to travel further and further afield to obtain what they once had access to locally. In addition, in low density areas, the dispersion of resources and non-integrated management of those that are available make it impossible to offer the best service at the lowest cost. Adjustments to the basket of services deemed necessary and service pooling are strategies to be considered.

Lastly, a weak economic base may also be linked to dependence on outside companies. Entrepreneurial spirit and greater social cohesion can significantly contribute to meeting the economic challenges facing rural communities.

In response to these challenges, sociologist Bruno Jean (2002), a specialist in rural issues, has proposed a strategy built around five winning conditions:

1. Adopt a sustainable development perspective

   This perspective is, of course, the very basis for recognizing the multifunctional character of rural regions and harmonizing the economic, ecological, and social dimensions of rural life. This approach also implies strengthening the capacity of communities to take action to ensure the viability of their environment.

2. Bring in development assistance policies

   In most cases, market mechanisms alone are insufficient to ensure rural revitalization. Revitalization also requires ongoing government assistance, which is justified in the name of national solidarity, a balanced regional development policy, and the obligation to protect the environment and natural heritage of the regions.

3. Strengthen the development capabilities of rural communities

   The difference between a declining community and a prosperous one is not solely due to traditional factors (availability of natural resources and capital, location, etc.), but also to something more intangible—its own ability to develop. The strengthening of development capabilities can be defined as a process by which individuals, groups, organizations, and companies enhance their ability to identify and tackle development challenges in a sustainable manner.

4. Increase access to public lands and natural resources

   Communities must be given greater access to public resources and a more direct opportunity to benefit from resource development on public lands in their region, rather than allowing all the benefits to go to urban centers.

5. Recognize the contribution of rural regions to urban prosperity

   Rural and urban economies are interdependent. Rural resources (food, energy, rural scenic amenities, etc.) contribute to urban quality of life. In keeping with the second condition, urban resources (primarily financial) must be channeled to support the process of rural revitalization.

EXAMPLE 1
THE " INHABITED FOREST OF NÉDÉLEC "

Since the mid-1990s, Roulec 95, an organization founded by the residents of Nédélec in Québec's Témiscamingue region, has helped ensure the sustainability of this small, 470-person agroforestry community through integrated resource development. Roulec harvests timber on public land, oversees the forest management plan and logging operations on other land in the domain of State under Regional County Municipality (RCM) responsibility[4] and is involved in launching related businesses that leverage the potential of the local environment. In addition to creating jobs and revitalizing and diversifying the local economy, the project also contributes, through community efforts, to developing the area's multiresource potential.

As was the case in a number of agroforestry communities in the Abitibi-Témiscamingue region, the municipality of Nédélec was facing devitalization in the early 1990s. Young people were leaving in droves, unemployment was high, and houses were vacant. Acting under the impetus of the *États généraux du monde rural* symposium, held in 1991 by the *Union des producteurs agricoles*, a symposium uniting rural actors organized by the agricultural producers' union, and spurred on by Québec's program to transfer to municipalities undeveloped government properties located in municipalities established in 1992, a group of Nédélec residents undertook an assessment of the harvest and development potential of these properties. This assessment led to the founding of Roulec in August 1995.

In addition to taking over responsibility from the Regional County Municipality for the management of the properties transferred, Roulec also signed an agreement with Norbord Industries, which holds the timber supply and forest management agreement for public lands in the area. This 20-year contract with Norbord, is renegotiable every five years, and allows the organization to reap economic benefits from logging operations within Nédélec's boundaries. It also ensures that logging is spread over time and based on tree maturity. In exchange, Roulec ensures that all harvested timber is sent to Norbord plants. Under Québec's "Inhabited Forest" program, the organization also received a government grant to conduct a study on the area's multiresource potential. Other development projects envisaged in the medium and long term will result from these initiatives, subject to additional negotiations with Norbord. They include plans for a large-scale blueberry growing operation as well as recreational projects linked to the construction of nature trails and to sports fishing.

In short, these initiatives have revitalized the community and provided it with renewed stability by drawing upon Nédélec's social and environmental capital.

---

4. Scattered lots or parcels of lots under government jurisdiction located within municipal boundaries.

EXAMPLE 2

THE *DOMAINE DES CHUTES DU RUISSEAU CREUX* IN SAINT-ALPHONSE: A PROJECT THAT MOBILIZED THE COMMUNITY

Saint-Alphonse is an agroforestry community of 969 people located 14 km from *Baie des Chaleurs* in the Regional County Municipality of Bonaventure, in the Gaspé area. In the mid-1990s, a series of community projects were developed to enhance the sustainability of the village.

Domaine des Chutes du Ruisseau Creux is a recreation area established in 1996 featuring bike and quad paths as well as horse and hiking trails. The project was the work of the *Comité de développement touristique*, a volunteer non-profit organization (NPO) devoted to the development of the tourist industry, and was intended to diversify the local municipal economy, which depends primarily on a sawmill that burned down in 1995, but has since been completely rebuilt.

This project grew out of the actions of a group of area residents who mobilized in the early 1990s under the impetus of the *Ralliement Gaspésien et Madelinot* movement, a group of citizens committed to ensuring the development of their region. After establishing a local development committee, members struck a series of subcommittees, known as "development roundtables" to come up with projects for the future. They looked at issues related to tourism development, the forest, the environment, sports and leisure, culture, agriculture, health and social services, and population aging. Within a year, nearly 250 people were involved in the roundtables, whose work led to the adoption of a five-year development plan.

Among the projects the roundtables came up with, *Domaine des Chutes du Ruisseau Creux* proved to be an important source of development. Located on 288 hectares of public land, the recreation area attracted 10,000 tourists in 2002, bringing increased business to village merchants and helping create new jobs in the community. The project also provided area residents with a renewed sense of belonging and allowed them to develop an original model of community solidarity.

EXAMPLE 3

SAINT-FABIEN-DE-PANET: AN ONGOING INVESTMENT IN HOUSING IMPROVEMENT

Since 1982, initiatives by the population of Saint-Fabien-de-Panet have stemmed an outflow of elderly residents and young families and spurred the revitalization of this small service center of 1,041 inhabitants 60 km south of Montmagny in the Chaudière-Appalaches region.

In the early 1980s, a group of residents, assisted by the community development officer at the *Centre local de services communautaires (CLSC)*, the local health and social services centre, realized that they had to act to stop community devitalization, particularly by tackling the shortage of services and housing for seniors and young families. With housing as their first priority, the group set up a housing development committee made up of residents and

representatives of the municipality, *Caisse populaire* (credit union), and *CLSC*. The committee decided to take advantage of existing government programs to carry out projects. A housing coop was established and a 10 unit apartment building for young families was built in 1985. Two years later, a second project—the conversion of a former convent into housing for seniors—was completed.

In 1992, the committee organized a promotional campaign targeting former residents, young families, and seniors, and focusing on the availability of services and affordable land. In the face of strong demand, the committee decided to add 17 new units for young retirees to the convent and convert the rectory into apartments for seniors. Despite these efforts, the committee came to realize that young families still lacked the means to purchase a house, and that elderly residents, seeking to sell their homes and move into the new units, were having difficulty finding buyers. So in 2000, the housing coop acquired 15 of these houses and renovated them to provide subsidized housing to families.

Together, these projects have resulted in the creation of 75 new housing units for various clienteles. Given that there is still a waiting list of families interested in returning to Saint-Fabien, the committee hopes to develop new projects and reach a target of 100 units in time for the village centennial in 2004.

It is also worth noting that in addition to these housing projects, Saint-Fabien has also taken action to improve community services and recreational facilities, further enhancing quality of life. These initiatives have all benefited the village. The population has grown, bringing new students to the school and new service jobs in the community. The renovations of old houses, the schools, and the rectory have preserved the village's heritage character. The coop model has kept rental costs down. A whole series of services has been maintained, notably the *CLSC*, school, daycare, library, and recreational programs. And lastly, through their achievements, local residents have undoubtedly developed a sense of pride and belonging that strengthens the sense of social cohesion.

Photo: Claude Doyon

EXAMPLE 4
AND SEVERAL OTHER LOCAL DEVELOPMENT EXPERIENCES FROM ACROSS QUÉBEC

Other efforts to preserve the vitality of small communities in regions across Québec are also worth noting:

- In the Eastern Townships village of Saint-Camille, local residents have taken a series of measures since the mid-1980s to stem outmigration. One of the more notable initiatives by the *Association Le P tit Bonheur de Saint-Camille* was the conversion of the old general store into an activity center offering a program of community and cultural activities. The Association is especially active in the new information technologies field, providing public Internet access and training to residents, as well as technical support services to organizations, companies, and individuals. One of its objectives is to encourage teleworking. The Association has also set up the *Centre d'interprétation du milieu rural*, an interpretation centre on rural areas. The Centre is involved in a networked rural school project and also organizes various activities and courses on rural communities and their development.

http://pages.globetrotter.net/pbonheur/pac.html

- Residents of the Lower St. Lawrence village of Sainte-Paule started mobilizing in 1998 to develop projects to revitalize this community of slightly over 200 residents 30 km from Matane. The threatened closure of the village school, which was down to seven students, was one of the main factors that triggered the mobilization, which sparked a forum where various development projects were discussed. One of the projects implemented after the forum was converting Val Joubert primary school into an accredited Brundtland Green school with an environmental studies curriculum. Not only did the project save the village school, it quickly attracted new students from as far away as Matane. In 1998–99, 22 students attended the school, and in 2002–2003, enrolment stood at 53. The *Corporation de développement Sainte-Paule* has supported a number of other projects, including in tourism and forestry that have also contributed to the revitalization of the community.

- In the North Shore village of Chute-aux-Outardes, a school program called *Mon ami, mon village* (My friend, My village), was developed to foster a sense of community pride among village children and the local population. First introduced in 1994, the program includes a weekly class activity, use of a special room for the program, parent lectures by members of the community, and an annual campaign promoting village strengths. The program teaching kit is now used in other small communities in Québec.

– As in a number of other rural areas, the residents of eight municipalities in the Gaspé region from the Regional County Municipality of Avignon now enjoy access to a collective transit service. Organized by the local volunteer center, *Transport Intervillage Avignon* provides scheduled carpool and minibus service on set days between the municipalities. This transit service meets the varying transportation requirements of area residents, facilitating access to health services, businesses, youth centers, schools, the workplace, and recreational destinations. In addition to enhancing quality of life and putting an end to isolation, collective transit may help limit the exclusion of certain groups and develop new networks of solidarity, notably through carpooling.

3. LANDSCAPES

Problems and Definitions

The concept of landscape is used in a variety of disciplines and areas of professional practice, but in the realm of land use and land use planning, one definition should be favored: a landscape is a portion of territory invested with special significance in terms of the living environment. Three aspects can confer special character and significance on a place.

A viewpoint, site, or structure may have special esthetic appeal due to its beauty, its spectacular or remarkable nature, or the peacefulness it conveys. Buildings and other features can have ethnological or historical importance, bearing witness to old traditions, ways of life, and patterns of land occupancy. And lastly, a place may be associated with play and leisure, with the pleasure of feeling and experiencing—the sensual nature of the landscape experience, so to speak.

In its own way, this idea of landscape as multi-facetted meaning is not unlike the widely held view of landscapes as places of beauty or interest valued for some special significance. The challenge of the landscape approach is to understand and deal with the qualitative dimensions of a given territory. This involves special methods of analysis and elaborate decision-making processes, which we have attempted to illustrate in the examples at the end of the chapter.

From a more technical standpoint, applying the concept of landscape to the practice of land use planning introduces the notion that the coherence and quality of a given territory should be considered in its entirety, i.e., as a spatial entity—usually a large one—made up of a heterogeneous ensemble of natural and built features. Such ensembles are heterogeneous because they involve numerous types and levels of intervention affecting numerous features (e.g., forests, waterways, architecture and settlements, land subdivision). The landscape approach is one of the few that can encompass and deal with all of them simultaneously, and from a specific angle. It deals with large expanses of territory or large spatial entities because land viewed as a landscape is virtually unlimited in scope, with viewpoints stretching to infinity or offering a constantly changing field of vision. Landscape planning therefore introduces a new problem of scale, both in understanding the object and determining modes of intervention, which are generally subject to administrative territorial divisions.

A Special Feature of Rurality

Urban landscapes exist, of course—many of them magnificent—but in the popular imagination, landscapes are found first and foremost in rural areas: along rivers, at the foot of mountains, by the sea, in the countryside. For most people, the idea of landscape is dominated by nature, whether untamed or shaped by human hands. And rural areas—farming, forest, and maritime regions alike—derive their special essence from nature's presence. Living in a rural environment today means still maintaining a special relationship with the natural environment, the dominant feature in a widely dispersed human habitat. From this perspective, not only do rural areas "have more landscapes than elsewhere," they also emerge as landscapes. Not only is the Gaspé peninsula rich in remarkable landscape, but there is in fact something called the Gaspé landscape.

Here we touch upon an important element derived from the concept of landscape, the notion of regional identity—an identity founded on geography, of course, but also on the traces of historical occupancy. Such identities are all the more compelling because their relationship with geography, and nature in general, leaves them largely intact and readily discernible, with traces of occupancy that follow upon each other in relative continuity: architecture, structures, settlements, land subdivision, historical land ownership. All these elements adapt to the site and combine to create a landscape. Geography is given, history has manifested itself, a heritage has been created, and depending on the size of the area, a landscape has emerged, helping forge a collective identity. For many of Québec's regions, this specificity endures despite the erosive impact of development and contemporary standardized constructions, forming the basis of a meaningful living environment and an attraction for visitors.

Landscapes, an Inhabited Environment

Landscapes in rural areas are the backdrop of daily life, and frequently ignored and neglected as everyday places often are. Hence the urgent need for action as the threat of homogenization looms. Until relatively recently, the slow pace of tradition, the distinct lifestyles engendered by rural self-sufficiency, and the need to adapt to nature's demands and constraints combined to spontaneously create environments that, in most regards, were harmonious and characteristic. Land occupancy has accelerated, using methods and techniques radically different from those traditionally employed to create our built heritage and the contours of our towns, villages and landscapes. Few of today's landscaping and construction solutions are as much in symbiosis with their environments as the local fieldstone used to build farmhouses in days gone by. Amplified by globalization, the spread of copycat lifestyles contributes to the homogenization of land occupancy, whereas the desire to enjoy modern day comforts and culture—no matter how noble—threatens the wellbeing and unique cultures that rural areas can offer. Taking action to protect and promote landscapes is, above all, a way to improve the living environment of rural residents.

In rural regions, as everywhere else, buildings, structures, signage, and other "embellishments" go in with little regard for the character of the site or the natural and built environment. Over time, through a multitude of decisions, permits, and small projects; through a certain conception of need and utility; sometimes supposedly even for beauty's sake; the landscape gradually degrades. Vigilance and awareness are crucial, even though there is a growing awareness of the importance of landscape in terms of heritage and the environment, and progress is being made.

The Landscape: Nature's Show and Nature's Resource

Rural regions are a wellspring of natural resources: timber, soil, minerals, wildlife, etc. But as living landscapes, they are also resources in themselves, home to remarkable places that invite contemplation and spaces to discover and explore, with an atmosphere and identity all their own. Of course, rural landscapes have always drawn tourists eager to enjoy natural beauty and spectacular scenery. More recently, however, they have begun to attract people who are seeking a certain kind of rural atmosphere coupled with outdoor activities, and simple authenticity. This clientele is growing steadily and is increasingly opting to live in the country, contributing to a certain form of rural revitalization.

Acting to protect and develop the rural landscape also means taking measures for classic tourism and this new category of visitors, and promoting a new way of rural living.

A Living Space and a Visiting Space: Resolving the Dilemma

From province-wide decisions on land use planning to modest initiatives in residential construction or commercial signage, regions face the challenge of meeting the immediate, daily needs of residents while preserving the quality and significance of landscapes, both for the development and future of the region and for landscape continuity and heritage preservation.

There are *Manoir Richelieu* and *Château Montebello*, the *Rocher Percé* and the falls on the Manitou River, the Mingan Archipelago and Mont Orford. But there are also the coastal villages of the Gaspé Peninsula, the mountain villages of Charlevoix, the Ottawa River circuit, the busy port of Havre-Saint-Pierre... Now inextricably associated with these classic tourist destinations, these everyday landscapes incarnate the spirit and essence of these places. Because of new tourist clienteles and a new awareness and sensibility, they are a resource with great potential. Good planning practices and urban bylaws can ensure that these environments evolve in such a way as to contribute substantially to the development of the communities that call them home.

Contemporary land occupancy practices require a conscientious and deliberate look at the landscape issue in its entirety: random impacts now pose too great a risk, practices have multiplied and diversified, there is no longer a tradition to coordinate actions, and technology can now generate colossal change. Landscape standardization is occurring, quickly and surely, spurred on by technology, copycat architecture, regulatory standardization, rapid urbanization, and globalization. The preservation and promotion of territorial identities and specificities is vital to ensuring the maintenance and creation of attractive, quality living environments.

EXAMPLE 1
LANDSCAPE INVENTORY AND DIAGNOSTIC MAPPING OF THE GASPÉ, LOWER ST. LAWRENCE AND NORTH SHORE REGIONS

La Martre, Haute-Gaspesie, photo Claude Michaud, 1999

There are numerous and innovative examples of how the *Ministère des Affaires municipales, du Sport et du Loisir* has taken the landscape dimension into account, notably in the area of land use and urban planning. With regard to landscapes and the principles guiding the landscape approach, the department has sought to enhance awareness and knowledge and has incorporated this dimension into legislation and into the programs, expertise, and technical support it provides to department clients and partners, notably in the municipal sphere.

The department's local planning and development branch, which assists towns and municipalities with development plan preparation, strives to help regional county municipalities improve their planning choices and practices and adopt a development perspective. In three pilot regions where the natural landscape has a major influence and is also an important asset—the Gaspé Peninsula, the North Shore, and the Lower St. Lawrence—landscape mapping was conducted to provide a regional planning tools and to assist in promoting the region (Michaud et al., 1995, 1997a, 1997b and 2002).

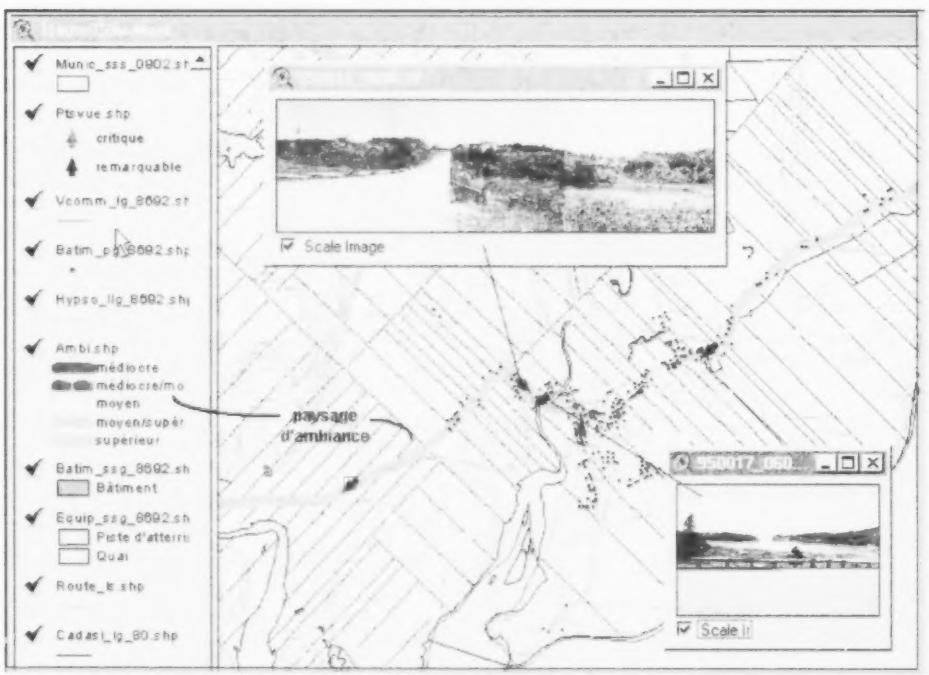
One of the goals of the project was to foster awareness of the importance of landscapes in both providing a quality environment and generating economic benefits at a time when this resource is threatened by urbanization. These studies are also a tool available to those with an influence over landscape evolution to help them diagnose landscape status and plan future actions.

All three projects were approached from a regional perspective, both administratively and geographically. Each one involved a number of regional county municipalities that shared geophysical characteristics extending well beyond their territorial boundaries. Over the years, these characteristics have helped create occupations and activities that strengthened regional unity and forged distinctive regional identities. For example, each of the regions borders the St. Lawrence River as it widens to the sea, providing magnificent, constantly changing views from atop the coastal promontories. In the Lower St. Lawrence region, the landscape is still marked by fertile plains and plateaus dotted with historic villages. These give way to fishing villages as you make your way deeper into the Gaspé Peninsula, where fertile land is rare and the mountains and the sea dominate. Across the water on the North Shore, the more recently settled coast alternates between fishing communities and industrial towns, punctuated by rushing rivers, peat bogs, and boreal forest.

In these vast regions, human settlement has been concentrated primarily along the coast. The result is a more or less continuous linear population cluster on either side of the main highway in each region. In the Lower St. Lawrence and Gaspé regions, Highway 132 describes a loop running around the entire peninsula. The North Shore can be discovered in a return journey along Highway 138. These highways are not only the main access to the region, but also the main access to the landscape. Landscape studies conducted for these regions have focused primarily on the importance of appreciating the features of a vast area, with travel by road providing the principal window. The resulting mapping encompasses and unifies the territory of each region in one continuous trajectory.

This trajectory is the basis for a dual appraisal of the landscape:

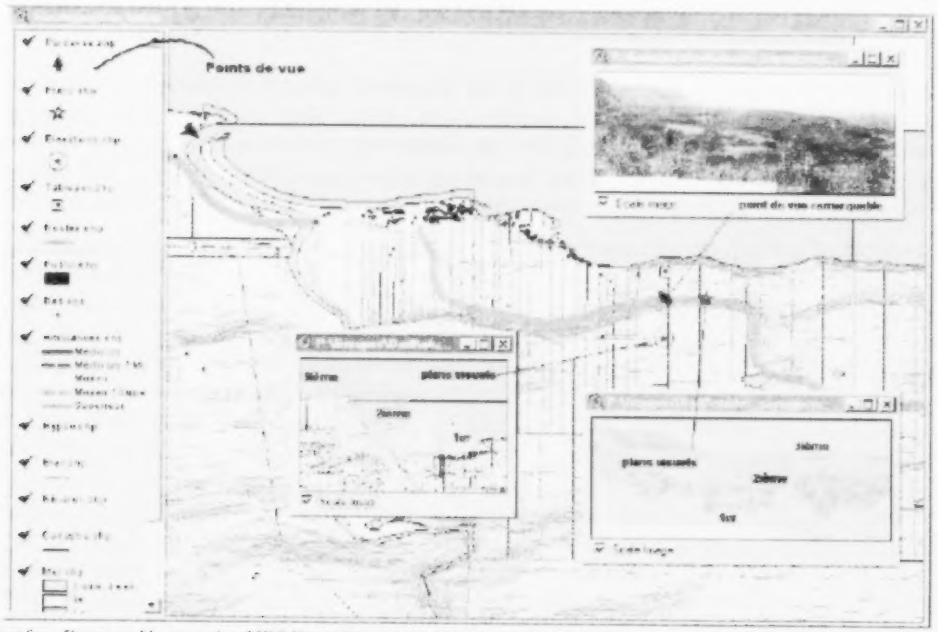
- The ambient landscape corresponds to the natural and built environment encompassed in the traveler's field of vision on either side of the highway. A continuous corridor of variable width, this space is depicted on the map as a colored line superposed over the highway. The color and type of line in each section indicates the appraisal of the ambient landscape.



Excerpt from **Cartographie paysagère, MRC Haute-Côte-Nord** by MAMM DADL 2002

- Viewpoints, both remarkable and critical, are **occasional** high points along the trajectory. Viewpoints are considered critical when they are deteriorating or when their strategic locations have not been exploited. In certain cases, viewpoints are identified with a visual

and textual description of their visual perspectives, accompanied by notes on specific intervention issues and problems.



Excerpt from **Cartographie paysagère, MRC Haute-Gaspésie** by MAMM/DADL, 2002

In both cases, appraisal is based on the three landscape criteria mentioned in the introductory section, i.e., esthetic appeal, ethnohistorical significance, and recreational potential. Appraisals first consider the question of quality of the environment for residents and visitors: is the environment beautiful, significant, attractive, etc.? They also take into account intervention issues (including the choice not to intervene but to preserve instead) related to the planning process. For example, an appraisal could determine that human intervention in an environment has impacted its landscape value and that other interventions could increase that value.

Natashquan, Minganie, photo Claude Michaud 2000

These mapping projects are intended to play a double role: provide an overview of a vast area by taking an inventory of key landscape features, and diagnose their status with a view to planning and intervention.

EXAMPLE 2
CONSEIL DU PAYSAGE QUÉBÉCOIS

Since 1994, the *Conseil du paysage québécois* (*CPQ*, or Québec Landscape Council) has been working to bring together stakeholders from various horizons to foster understanding of landscapes and promote landscape conservation and development. The Council seeks to develop awareness and expertise on various landscape-related issues, notably through promotion of a landscape charter. It has organized numerous meetings and activities, mainly in rural regions.

The Council was established in the wake of a major 1994 symposium on Québec landscapes, the *États généraux du paysage québécois*. This Québec City event mainly attracted representatives of professional bodies with a common interest in sharing knowledge and developing means for action. Their multidisciplinary approach led to formation of the Council by 12 professional bodies and associations: the *Association des aménagistes régionaux du Québec* (regional planners), the *Association des archéologues du Québec* (archeologists), the *Association des architectes paysagistes du Québec* (landscape architects), the *Association des biologistes du Québec* (biologists), the *Association des économistes québécois* (economists), the *Association des urbanistes et aménagistes municipaux du Québec* (urban and municipal planners), the *Association professionnelle des géographes du Québec* (geographers), the *Ordre des agronomes du Québec* (agronomists), the *Ordre des architectes du Québec* (architects), the *Ordre des arpenteurs-géomètres du Québec* (land surveyors), the *Ordre des ingénieurs forestiers du Québec* (forest engineers), and the *Ordre des urbanistes du Québec* (professional planning order).

The *CPQ*'s mission is to manage a landscape information collection and distribution system, organize training activities and forums, and encourage analysis and research. More specifically, the *CPQ* has worked to design and promote a **Landscape Charter** that government stakeholders, municipal officials, tourist associations, and others are being asked to sign and implement (*CPQ*, 2000).

The Charter's originality lies in the moral commitment signatories make to protect and develop landscapes with a view to sustainable development. As a result, landscape issues are tied in with other Québec economic, social, and environmental priorities. The charter was adopted in 2000 and rapidly endorsed by five organizations in the scenic Charlevoix region—the regional county municipality, the regional tourist association, two local development centers, and the World Biosphere Reserve. More recently, the Québec City area municipality of Lac-Beauport also decided to adhere to the charter.

In order to encourage organizations to adhere to the charter, the Council has posted an online landscape guide on its Website. The goal of the guide is to provide practical expertise and to support local stakeholders in awareness-building and consultation initiatives meant to ensure that landscapes are given the consideration they deserve. According to the *CPQ*, the sharing of regional experiences and pooling of local resources are crucial tools for achieving the sought-after level of awareness and expertise. This is the purpose of the electronic guide.

QUÉBEC LANDSCAPE CHARTER

- ***A Collective Challenge***

Each of our territorial practices has a direct impact on landscape development. Yet our existing planning tools too easily dismiss the sensitive relationships our communities maintain with the land. Although certain landscapes, as witnesses to our secular heritage or bearers of outstanding natural features, have acquired a status that largely ensures their protection, many less remarkable landscapes are fragile, vulnerable, and at risk. The homogenization or erratic management of territory can have a significant impact on the identity and sense of belonging of a region's inhabitants.

It is therefore essential that landscape conservation and development be a subject of consultation. Institutions, businesses, professionals, and residents must be the well-informed arbitrators of regional and local conservation and development orientations. Landscapes must be built upon community consensus.

- ***Objectives***

The Charter sets out principles intended to guide players in their reflections and encourage consultation. Those players undertake to comply with these principles and take responsibility for the means chosen to take landscape specificity and evolution into account.

The Charter is an educational and awareness-enhancing tool meant to support local actions and foster cooperation with landscape conservation and development organizations. It aims to promote the value of landscapes and the distinctive character of the communities that have shaped them.

The Charter commits its signatories to respecting the principles and adopting the practice of landscape conservation and development all across Québec. Signatories may be individuals, businesses, or professional, associative, or government organizations.

THE CHARTER

Signatories undertake to respect the following principles:

- ***Individual and corporate citizens share responsibility with public bodies for recognizing , developing, and conserving landscapes.***
- ***Landscapes must be a fundamental concern during any land use intervention.***
- ***Landscapes constantly change and evolve, so interventions must—***
  - ***Take into account their specificity and particular features***
  - ***Be rooted in proper knowledge of a landscape's temporal, geographic, economic, heritage, cultural, ecological, and esthetic dimensions***
  - ***Ensure participatory and democratic community involvement to guarantee fair arbitration***
  - ***Ensure sustainable development based not only on economic viability, but on the right of residents to live in a culturally significant environment.***

Putting principles into action

Signatories will ensure that the means taken to implement these principles are adapted to the type of land use intervention envisaged and the communities involved. These means may take various forms:

1. *Recognize the multidimensional value of landscapes and take this into account when arbitrating land use practices*
2. *Identify distinctive landscape characteristics to help select the practices and activities best suited to ensuring community viability in both rural and urban environments*
3. *Establish and present the necessary links between heritage, the environment, and the landscape in order to ensure consistency of action*
4. *Adopt a concerted planning approach that involves a participatory process from the start allowing for dialogue with residents as well as community group involvement in decision making and the implementation of landscape conservation and development projects*
5. *Recognize the holistic dimension of landscape in existing and future land use planning and management tools, particularly development plans, planning programs, by-laws, and tourism development plans*
6. *Secure the commitment by private sector stakeholders to consult with the community, integrate landscape impact analyses and conservation measures into their projects, and participate in landscape development initiatives*
7. *Secure the commitment by public sector stakeholders to foster respect for the Charter through policy statements, action plans, and monitoring in their areas of jurisdiction*
8. *Heighten awareness among socioeconomic stakeholders of the value of landscapes as capital to be developed, and not solely resources to be exploited*
9. *Step up efforts in education and in promoting the value of landscapes, especially among young people and in educational programs at all levels.*
10. *Support research projects likely to contribute to landscape conservation and development, and promote dissemination of landscape-related knowledge and information.*

REFERENCES

CONSEIL DU PAYSAGE QUÉBÉCOIS (CPQ). 2000. *Charte du paysage québécois*, [online], Québec, January, 7 p.
http://www.paysage.qc.ca/cpq/charte.pdf

DOMON, Gérald and Sylvain PAQUETTE. 2000. "Le paysage comme agent de recomposition des communautés rurales du sud du Québec: Nouvelles possibilités, nouvelles exigences," in *Gouvernance et territoires ruraux: Éléments d'un débat sur la responsabilité du développement*, edited by Mario Carrier and Serge Côté, Sainte-Foy, Presses de l'Université du Québec, pp. 189–222.

DUGAS, Clermont. 1991. "Dévitalisation et décentralisation dans l'Est-du-Québec" in *De la Loire au Saint-Laurent: Des régions rurales face aux recomposition territoriales*, cited in Gouvernement du Québec. 2001. *Les orientations du gouvernement en matière d'aménagement: La protection du territoire et des activités agricoles*, Background paper, Québec, Ministère des Affaires municipales, 58 p.

JEAN, Bruno. 1997. *Territoires d'avenir, pour une sociologie de la ruralité*, Sainte-Foy, Presses de l'Université du Québec, 318 p.

JEAN, Bruno. 2002. "Réussir le développement approprié des régions rurales: quelques conditions gagnantes," in *Quel avenir pour les régions?*, edited by Louis Favreau, Martin Robitaille, and Daniel Tremblay, Gatineau, Canada Research Chair in Community Development at Université du Québec en Outaouais, pp. 81–93.

JEAN, Bruno. 2003. "La construction sociale de la ruralité," in Philippe Poullaouec-Gonidec, Sylvain Paquet, and Gérald Domon (eds), *Les temps du paysage: Actes du colloque tenu à Montréal les 23 et 24 septembre 1999*, Montreal, Les Presses de l'Université de Montréal, pp. 105–124.

LANGEVIN, Renée. 1997. *Guide de conservation des boisés en milieu agricole*, Québec, Environment Canada, Canadian Wildlife Service, 77 p.

MICHAUD, Claude et al. 1995. *Le tour de la Gaspésie par la route 132: Études et propositions pour l'aménagement d'un corridor touristique*, Ministère des Affaires municipales, Direction de l'aménagement et du développement local, September, 134 p.

MICHAUD, Claude et al. 1997a. *Routes d'accès et paysages dans la région du Bas-Saint-Laurent : cartographie des impressions visuelles - Tome I: MRC de Kamouraska, de Rivière-du-Loup, de Témiscouata et des Basques*, Ministère des Affaires municipales, Direction de l'aménagement et du développement local, 58 p.

MICHAUD, Claude et al. 1997b. *Routes d'accès et paysages dans la région du Bas-Saint-Laurent : cartographie des impressions visuelles – Tome II: MRC de Rimouski-Neigette, de La Mitis, de Matane et de La Matapédia*, Ministère des Affaires municipales, Direction de l'aménagement et du développement local, 66 p.

MICHAUD, Claude et al. 2002. *Cartographie paysagère informatisée de la région de la Côte-Nord*, Ministère des Affaires municipales et de la Métropole, Direction de l'aménagement et du développement local.

QUÉBEC (Gouvernement du). 1996. *Vers un réseau municipal viable: Rapport du Comité sur les communautés rurales*, Québec, Ministère des Affaires municipales, 107 p.

QUÉBEC (Gouvernement du). 2001a. *Des communautés rurales innovantes pour une occupation dynamique du territoire québécois: Politique nationale de la ruralité*, Québec, Ministère des Régions, 73 p.

QUÉBEC (Gouvernement du). 2001b. *Les orientations du gouvernement en matière d'aménagement : La protection du territoire et des activités agricoles*, Background paper, Québec, Ministère des Affaires municipales et de la Métropole, 58 p.

QUÉBEC (Gouvernement du). 2003. *Action concertée pour le soutien stratégique à la promotion et à la consolidation de la recherche sur l'environnement rural*, Fonds québécois de la recherche sur la nature et les technologies, 43 p.